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THE LOGIC OF INTERPRETATION

By Richard Shusterman

I

One of the more important and controversial problems in contemporary analytic aesthetics concerns the logic of critical interpretation. There appear to be at least three distinguishable, though closely related, aspects of the problem. The first concerns the logical status of interpretative statements. Do such statements express propositions with some sort of truth value or do they merely express decisions or recommendations? If the former, are these propositions really about the work itself or only about the critic's way of seeing it? Again, if interpretations do express propositions about the work itself, are they in principle determinable as true or false, or only at best as plausible or implausible?

Critics typically support their interpretations with reasons. The second aspect of the problem thus concerns the logical role of these reasons. Do they function as real evidence logically supporting an interpretative conclusion, or are they but rhetorical devices to persuade the reader to adopt the critic's point of view? Are they perhaps but further descriptions of the critic's experience of the work, or are they aids for focusing attention on something or for creating a desired perception in the reader?

The third aspect, intimately connected with the second, concerns the general form or character of interpretative argument. If these arguments are indeed logical, is their logic typically inductive, deductive, or rather something entirely different?

In their attempt to determine the logic of interpretation, analytic philosophers of art have propounded very different views regarding these three aspects of the problem, often without distinguishing between them. It should be stressed that for these philosophers the attempt to determine the logic of interpretation is primarily an analytic or descriptive matter, not a normative or legislative one.[1] Their aim is to analyse the logic actually employed in interpretation, not to recommend a logic that should be employed; they claim to describe what qualified critics actually do in interpreting, not to prescribe what they should do. Yet when we survey the results of their analyses, we find a perplexingly wide divergence of views. Aestheticians hotly debate which of these analyses of interpretative logic is the correct one, but seem to be getting no closer to the solution of this question.

[1]Some analytic aestheticians do, however, make critical recommendations, e.g., Beardsley, whose "intentional fallacy" is a case of legislating against authorial intention as a goal or standard of criticism. See M. C. Beardsley, *The Possibility of Criticism* (Detroit, 1973).

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I believe that the reason for this is that the question itself is spurious. There is no one logic of interpretation, but rather many logics of interpretation. Different critics play different interpretative "games" with different sets of rules or "logics" implicit in the games they practise. These different games reflect and serve different ends, and the diversity of these games and their variant logics is concealed by the fact that they are not explicitly formulated or demarcated and tend somewhat to overlap. The diversity of interpretative logics is further concealed by their sharing much the same terms (e.g., 'the poem', 'the right interpretation'), though using them in often very different senses. I maintain, then, that the cause for the divergence of analyses of interpretative logic is that they are analysing different logics. They take as their objects different interpretative games.

In this paper I should like to substantiate this claim by briefly surveying some of the major theories on the logic of interpretation and pointing to the different critical games which they respectively describe. By so demonstrating that critical interpretation is not a univocal concept, I should like to argue that the philosopher, as analyst, is not justified in rejecting interpretative games which do not fit his model on the grounds that they are not "true" interpretation or that they do not satisfy the "true" or "proper" ends of interpretation. For the true nature and ends of interpretation are essentially contested by critics, and thus to determine such questions is to legislate or recommend and not to analyse.

One final introductory remark: philosophical analyses of critical interpretations might themselves be illuminatingly compared to the interpretations they analyse. For as the critic interprets the meaning and import of the original work of literature, so the aesthetician must interpret the interpreting critic's remarks. As the same work or line of poetry may be taken in a number of ways, so the same critical interpretation or remark may sometimes be taken or interpreted differently. As the interpreting critic may sometimes assert that a line has a meaning other than that the author intended, so the interpreting meta-critic sometimes asserts that a critical remark has a logical status different from that the critic intended or thought it to have. We might, with hesitation, continue this analogy to suggest that as there seems little likelihood that we shall reach a simple, final, and unchallengeable interpretation of a complex work of literature, there is not much hope that we shall reach a simple, final, and unchallengeable interpretation of interpretation.

II

What is the logical status of interpretative statements? There seem to be three major theories about this issue which we may characterize as descriptivism, prescriptivism, and performativism. To make our comparison of them more convenient let us adopt the formula '*W* is *I*' as representing a typical interpretative statement (e.g., "*Measure for Measure* is allegorical",

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"*Hamlet* is a study of a vacillating, melancholy hero"); where '*W*' is a variable whose values are works of literature, and '*I*' is a variable whose values are interpretative predicates about works of literature. We can then portray and contrast these three interpretative positions by seeing how they differently analyse this formula.

(a) Descriptivism treats interpretative statements as expressing propositions. But there are many brands of descriptivism which find very different propositions in the same typical interpretative statement. The subjectivist construes '*W* is *I*' as '*W* is *I* to me'. Oscar Wilde and Walter Pater are among the most famous proponents of this theory of interpretation, and many critics have indeed practised interpretation in accordance with it. These critics, who include Pater, Swinburne, Huneker[2], and Symons[3], have been appropriately labelled impressionist critics, since their interpretative assertions concern their impression of the work. Here, if the critic is sincere, his interpretation will be true, but such truth may be aesthetically trivial in the sense that it is truth about the work of art's effect on the critic and not about the work itself. The value of such interpretation is seen not in its literal truth but in the beauty and richness of experience it describes and affords its reader. An interpretation is evaluated in much the same way as the work it interprets is evaluated, and we thus should view, to borrow Wilde's phrase, "the critic as artist".

Subjectivism has its appeal. Conflicting interpretative statements about a work of literature and our critical tolerance of them are easily explained by the subjectivist position, for certainly a work can be or mean different things to different people. However, it cannot be denied that not all interpreting critics accept the theory or practise according to the subjectivist standard. Many critics rather claim or assume that their interpretative efforts are aimed at Matthew Arnold's non-subjectivist goal, "to see the object as in itself it really is".

Such an ideal is held by the strong descriptivist or absolutist, for whom '*W* is *I*' quite simply means '*W* is *I*'. Interpretative statements are either true or false, and conflicting interpretations are incompatible and cannot be accepted. The interpreter either correctly describes the true meaning of the work or he is not successful; and the true meaning of the work may be identified with authorial intention (e.g., E. D. Hirsch[4]) or it may not (e.g., M. C. Beardsley).[5] We may never know or be certain of the true interpretation, but it is there to be known and makes all interpretations which differ from it false. This straightforward view is troubled by the fact that very

[2]J. G. Huneker, *Selected Essays* (London, 1930).

[3]A. Symons, *Studies in Elizabethan Drama* (London, 1920). Discussion of these impressionist critics can be found in T. S. Eliot's "The Perfect Critic", in F. Kermode (ed.), *Selected Prose of T. S. Eliot* (London, 1975); and in H. Osborne, *Aesthetics and Criticism* (London, 1955), pp. 318-20.

[4]E. D. Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation* (New Haven, 1967).

[5]Beardsley, *op. cit.*

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different interpretations of the same work often strike one as acceptable and, in some sense, apt. Yet, by the absolutist doctrine, only one of them can be true, and the others must therefore be wrong or false.

Because of this problem, several aestheticians have suggested a brand of weak descriptivism which abandons the notion of absolute truth and falsity for the logically weaker notions of plausibility and adequacy. For the weak descriptivist, '*W* is *I*' means ' '*W* is *I*' is (highly or most) plausible' (Margolis[6]) or ' '*W* is *I*' is (highly or most) adequate' (Weitz[7]). It is worth remarking here that both Margolis and Weitz construe interpretative assertions as expressing explanatory hypotheses and not statements of matters of fact, and that both maintain that the plausibility or adequacy of interpretations can be graded, albeit vaguely. It also should be mentioned that these philosophers distinguish interpretation from description, the latter being statement of facts and the former the explanation of these facts. Yet their belief that there are such facts supporting and explained by an interpretation places them in the descriptivist camp.

It is noteworthy that both strong and weak descriptivists can and do appeal to differing interpretative procedures in actual critical practice to support their meta-critical models. Thus Margolis, in arguing for his view that interpretations are logically weak and may tolerate each other even when they are non-converging and incompatible, cites the following "typical" remark from a book review to justify his position: "Too bare a summary cannot do justice to the cogency of Mr Knox's proofs or to his valuable incidental insights. His interpretations must be welcomed with thanks, provided we do not (as he would doubtless insist we should not) exclude other modes of interpretation".[8] Beardsley, the absolutist, in attacking Margolis's position and in arguing for the "intolerability of incompatible interpretations" also brings in examples of what he considers typical critical remarks to support his position: from Hynes, for instance, contrasting the opinions of Clark Emory and Hugh Kenner on the *Cantos*: "Obviously, they cannot both be right; if the passage describes an earthly paradise, then it cannot be a perversion of nature".[9]

Is Margolis's or Beardsley's citation more typical? Surely we are not to determine this by mere statistics, but there seems to be no other way. Is it not clear that these diverse remarks, claimed to be typical, are indeed typical of variant interpretative practices? The logical status of interpretations is thus differently described because not all interpretations have or are meant to have the same logical status. Thus far we have seen only the logical plurality within the descriptivist position, but there are two other

[6]J. Margolis, "The Logic of Interpretation", in J. Margolis (ed.), *Philosophy Looks at the Arts* (New York, 1962).

[7]M. Weitz, *Hamlet and the Philosophy of Literary Criticism* (London, 1972).

[8]Quoted from J. Margolis, "The Identity of a Work of Art", in F. Coleman (ed.), *Contemporary Studies in Aesthetics* (New York, 1968), p. 39.

[9]Beardsley, *op. cit.*, p. 43.

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general positions which claim to be *the* model or correct analysis of all interpretation, yet which, I shall maintain, merely model, like descriptivism, some of the many interpretative games that critics play.

(b) Prescriptivism regards interpretative statements not as expressing true or false propositions nor even adequate or inadequate hypotheses, but rather as expressing decisions or recommendations about how to regard the work of literature. The prescriptivist analyses '*W* is *I*' as '*W* should be seen as *I*' or '*W* is to be taken as *I*'. A work of literature may be seen in many different ways and be taken to mean many different things. Witness the vast variety of different views that critics have taken of *Hamlet*. According to prescriptivism the interpreting critic is recommending which manner of observing or taking the work we should adopt, and his arguments to support his interpretation are attempts to get us to accept this recommendation and see the work as he does. This position is strongly suggested in Wittgenstein's writings on aesthetics and in his notion of aspects, and it would seem to be held by such contemporary aestheticians as Aldrich, Isenberg, and Stevenson.[10] Stevenson, who gives the clearest and most cogent presentation of prescriptivism, argues that interpretative judgements are essentially expressions of "the critic's decision" on how the work of art should be observed and "quasi-imperative" recommendations that others should observe or regard the work similarly. "Having roughly familiarized himself with all the ways in which a work of art *can* be experienced, a critic must proceed to make a selection from among them—a *decision* about how he is to observe the work in the course of his subsequent appreciation" (*op. cit.*, p. 357). "It is the task of a critic not merely to dwell upon an aesthetic surface, but to make up his mind, and to help others make up their minds, *which* aesthetic surface is to be dwelt upon" (p. 380). For Stevenson, "the critic's "decision" —the channelling of his sensibilities in which he comes to accept certain ways of observing a work of art, when appreciating it, and to reject others" (p. 361)—introduces the normative or prescriptive character of interpretative judgements. This is because such decisions are based on and governed by factors that are not merely logical or cognitive. Stevenson admits that critics often give their interpretative statements the air of objective description, but he argues that behind this guise of objectivity, interpretative statements really function as prescriptions or quasi-imperative recommendations. Thus, for example, when the critic makes the interpretative assertion that a work is unified, he is implicitly, but essentially, recommending that we observe it in that way; and our acceptance of this judgement may be compared "with the overtly imperative expression, 'Yes, let's observe it in the way that makes it appear unified' " (p. 374).

This, then, is the prescriptivist view of interpretation. It can explain

[10]V. Aldrich, *Philosophy of Art* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1963); A. Isenberg, "Critical Communication", in *Philosophy Looks at the Arts*, *op. cit.* (fn. 6); C. L. Stevenson, "Interpretation and Evaluation in Aesthetics", in M. Black (ed.), *Philosophical Analysis* (Ithaca, 1950).

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the existence and relative tolerance of a variety of interpretations and the challengeability and lack of finality of any one interpretation. It can do so simply by its view that there are many different ways of seeing the work and that an interpretation, i.e., the recommendation of one way, does not logically exclude other ways as false or unprofitable. Critics often debate over which interpretation is better or worse, or even right or wrong; but right and wrong or proper and improper must not be confused here with true and false. For prescriptivism, the critic, in asserting that his interpretation is proper or right, is essentially asserting that the work of art should be taken or seen as he sees it rather than that it factually is what he describes it as.

The prescriptivist position purports to describe actual interpretative practice and can indeed support itself by appealing to certain remarks of qualified critics which distinctly suggest the prescriptivist view. The prescriptivist tenet that the interpretation a critic propounds is only one of many possible interpretations a work may admit is strongly suggested by one interpreter of *Hamlet*, F. Fergusson.[11] Fergusson, who argues for his own myth-ritual interpretation of *Hamlet*, admits that the work can be seen differently from other points of view. Nor do differing interpretations logically exclude or rule one another out. "It is not necessary to rule out the Eliot-Robertson or the Joycean interpretation, merely because one accepts Mr Dover Wilson's: on the contrary, the various critics should be taken as Jamesian "reflectors", each lighting a facet of the whole from his own peculiar angle" (p. 101). All these other possible interpretations are nevertheless rejected by Fergusson. Even Weitz, who argues against the prescriptivist view of interpretation, admits that Fergusson's remarks and practice do suggest "the view that critical interpretations are neither true nor false, but invitations on the part of the critic to see the play or some aspect of it in the way the critic proposes in his particular interpretation".[12]

The second prescriptivist tenet, that the critic is essentially deciding and urging that of the many viable ways of seeing the work his way should be adopted, and that the interpretative statement is in this sense normative and quasi-imperative, might seek support from critical remarks like the following by Leavis, which are not atypical. Leavis, arguing against the established view of Othello as a noble hero cunningly undone by a greater villain whose mind and character are as intriguing and crucial as Othello's, surely seems to recommend in normative fashion a way of seeing the play. "We ought not in reading those scenes to be paying so much attention to the intrinsic personal qualities of Iago as to attribute to him tragic interest of this kind."[13] He continues to urge us in a quasi-imperative manner:

[11]F. Fergusson, *The Idea of a Theatre*, Princeton, 1943.

[12]Weitz, *op. cit.* (fn. 7), p. 102.

[13]F. R. Leavis, "Diabolic Intellect and the Noble Hero", in *The Common Pursuit* (Harmondsworth, 1976), p. 138.

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"And it is plain that what we should see in Iago's prompt success is not so much Iago's diabolical intellect as Othello's readiness to respond" (p. 140). It is perhaps possible to give a non-prescriptivist interpretation of these remarks, but nevertheless such remarks, as they stand here and also in their context, surely suit and support the prescriptivist model of interpretation and make it seem that prescriptivism, like descriptivism, is a just account of some interpretative statements.

(c) Performativism holds a somewhat different view of interpretative statements. They are not descriptions or quasi-imperative recommendations but rather performances. '*W* is *I*' is construed not as a statement but as a practical demonstration of *W* in *I*-fashion. The performativist likens critical interpretation to interpretative performance and asserts that the former, like the latter, is creative in the sense of helping to create and determine the qualities and meaning of the work of art rather than merely revealing them. By this theory, the features and meaning of the work are not just there to be picked out, described and listed by the critic, but rather are dependent on interpretation for their determination. The performativist denies the description/interpretation dichotomy, much as many philosophers of science reject the observation/theory dichotomy, for both hold that "the facts" are themselves theory- or interpretation-dependent.

As the prescriptivist could explain the widely divergent interpretations of a given work of literature as recommendations to observe the work in different ways, so the performativist can explain this variety of critical interpretation as parallel to that of interpretative performances, none of which is final in the sense of ruling out all others. Moreover, as the prescriptivist may employ the normative terms of right and wrong, correlative to the descriptivist true and false, so the performativist also may characterize or grade interpretations as successful or unsuccessful, convincing or unconvincing.

Though I have encountered no extensive formulation of the performativist position, two eminent aestheticians do profess views which could be characterized as performativist. R. Wollheim, for example, argues that critical interpretation, like interpretative performance, is ineliminable and never final, and he cites Valéry's maxim: "A creator is one who makes others create".[14] Wollheim also argues against the fact/interpretation dichotomy. M. Macdonald[15] presents the most explicit performativist statement, asserting that "criticism and appraisal, too, are more like creation than like demonstration and proof" (p. 130), and "that the task of the critic resembles those of the actor and executant rather than those of the scientist and logician" (p. 127). She also denies the fact/interpretation dichotomy, since works of art "are not simple objects whose features can be presented for

[14]R. Wollheim, *Art and its Objects* (Harmondsworth, 1970), p. 103.

[15]M. Macdonald. "Some Distinctive Features of Arguments Used in Criticism of the Arts", in Elton (ed.), *Aesthetics and Language* (Oxford, 1954).

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listing" (p. 126). Interpretation, then, is creative and helps create its object. Indeed, it is ineliminable since the work itself is constituted by its interpretations—is what it is interpreted to be—and cannot exist apart from some interpretation.

> It is often said that a great artist is reinterpreted in every age and no doubt by some of these interpretations he would be much astonished. Yet even the apparently bizarre interpretations are often illuminating. It seems to follow that interpretation is partly subjective invention . . . Certainly, the critic claims to be interpreting the work, not supplying his own fancies. But the work is what it is interpreted to be, though some interpretations may be rejected. There seems to be no work apart from *some* interpretation (p. 126).

There are several critics whose views would support this meta-critical position. H. Gardner,[16] for instance, tells us that we must "allow a work to gather meaning through the ages" (p. 17), and that consequently there can be no "final and infallible interpretation" (p. 51). L. Trilling[17] expresses a similar view, regarding the literary work as a kind of concrescence of various meanings it was held to have over the ages. L. Abercrombie maintains "that anything which may be found in that [work of] art, even if it is only the modern reader who can find it there, may legitimately be taken as its meaning".[18] This, of course, is only critical doctrine, but it is no doubt based on the success of creative critical practice. Miss Gardner, for example, cites Coleridge and Bradley as rewarding creative critics.

Moreover, it is not difficult to find performativist elements in the practice of critics who do not claim to be "creative" in this sense of determining the work rather than revealing it. J. Dover Wilson[19] in his interpretation of *Hamlet* argues for certain textual emendations which would result in changing the work as we have it in any of its early textual forms, e.g., substituting 'sullied' for 'solid' or 'sallied'. His interpretation also involves the insertion of what he considers lost or omitted stage directions; e.g., the "lost" stage direction giving Hamlet an entry on the inner stage in II, 2, 158, enabling him to overhear Polonius and Claudius plotting the eavesdropping of his talk with Ophelia, and the "fact" that Claudius does not see the dumb-show because he is talking instead with Polonius or Gertrude. Moreover, it is noteworthy that the validity of Wilson's interpretations are challenged and defended in terms of the success of possible and actual performances embodying them.[20]

The same sort of performative interpretation which seems more to determine than reveal or explain the alleged givens of a work may be seen in

[16]H. Gardner, *The Business of Criticism* (Oxford, 1963).

[17]L. Trilling, *The Liberal Imagination* (New York, 1950), p. 186.

[18]L. Abercrombie, "A Plea for the Liberty of Interpreting", *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 16 (1930), p. 21.

[19]J. Dover Wilson, *What Happens in Hamlet* (Cambridge, 1935).

[20]See Weitz, *op. cit.* (fn. 7), p. 130.

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M. C. Bradbrook's interpretation of the last soliloquy of *Doctor Faustus*, where she argues against Empson's reading.

> Ugly hell, gape not! Come not, Lucifer!
> I'll burn my books—Ah, Mephistopheles.
>
> The last is, of course, a scream (and so the reading proposed by Mr Empson does not stand).[21]

However, its being a scream is not, of course, a fact in the text which is described or explained by interpretation, but is itself a product of interpretation. The test of such an interpretation would seem to be its success and appeal rather than its truth as description or explanation. Even if it is defended in terms of being consistent or true to the rest of the play, one still seems to be justifying a creative determination on the grounds of harmony rather than justifying a descriptive truth by evidence.

There is more than a grain of truth in performativism, but like descriptivism and prescriptivism it errs by generalization. A roughly faithful model of some interpretative statements will be a distorted theory of all interpretative statements, because interpretative statements often differ significantly in what they logically express or perform.

III

As we distinguished three theories about the logical status of interpretative statements, so there seem to be three, though not wholly parallel, theories on the role of reasons in interpretation. The first claims that the reasons a critic gives for his interpretation are pieces of evidence which logically support his interpretative hypothesis. Though the hypothesis may not be fully verified, it may at least be confirmed as probable, plausible, or adequate by the reasons given in support of it. Thus, though the reasons may be inconclusive, their relation to the interpretative conclusion is taken to be a logical relation, reasons having the logical role of evidence.

This view very nicely complements the descriptivist position, and it is thus not surprising that Weitz, Margolis, Beardsley, and Hirsch adopt it. Moreover, I think it is clear that in certain interpretative undertakings reasons do have this role. Historically-oriented and especially author-oriented interpretation certainly employs its reasons as confirming evidence. If one's interpretative hypothesis concerns what the author intended by the poem, and for many critics this is the interpretative goal, then facts concerning the historical setting, the conventions and audience of the period, and the life and other writings of the author all may be introduced as evidence which helps to confirm or falsify the particular hypothesis. Even Stevenson, who rejects the view that reasons have this logical role of evidence, still admits that if one sees authorial meaning as the goal of interpretation, one could regard reasons as functioning as evidence in an inductive argument,

[21] M. C. Bradbrook, "Marlowe's *Faustus*", in W. Farnham (ed.), *Twentieth Century Interpretations of Doctor Faustus* (Englewood Cliffs, 1969), p. 22.

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"each giving to an interpretative conclusion this or that sort of partial confirmation".[22] Thus, for at least one interpretative game, though Stevenson thinks it not worth playing, reasons have a logical role as evidence.

But what then is Stevenson's view of the role of reasons in interpretation? Here, as elsewhere, he is a non-descriptivist, holding that the relation of reasons to an interpretative conclusion is not logical but causal and psychological. The interpretative judgement expresses the critic's decision to observe the work in a particular way; and his reasons for such a decision are not purely cognitive in nature, since in art-appreciation one's aims are not purely cognitive; besides, "like any psychological process, the critic's decision has a great many causes", among them "the critic's personal sensibilities".[23] Thus, the relation of critical reasons "to the quasi-imperative judgement they support (which is the same, in essentials, as the relation between knowledge and the decision knowledge guides) is causal rather than logical; hence they "guide without constraining" " (p. 370).

For an example of how reasons seem to function as causes or motives in a not wholly cognitive interpretative decision, take the reason James Smith gives for his allegorical interpretation of *Doctor Faustus*.

> Recognition of both these allegories, and that they are of complicated rather than simple type, is I think necessary to remove obstacles to the reader's enjoyment. For if it is not made, various absurdities arise which are incompatible with the reputation the play is felt to deserve.[24]

Here one decides or is urged to decide to adopt an allegorical interpretation in order not to diminish one's enjoyment or appreciation of the play. Such a reason far more resembles a motive or cause for taking an interpretative decision than a piece of evidence logically confirming a "scientific" hypothesis. The presence of a non-scientific element is obvious in such interpretative moves and does indeed support Stevenson's model. When reasons for an interpretation are so closely related to such goals as increasing the reader's enjoyment, or making the work more impressive, they do play a causal and normative role, explaining the motives for a decision and recommending this decision on the basis of these motives.

The third theory about the role of reasons might be called perceptualism. According to the perceptualist, interpretative reasons have two different but complementary roles. First, they may function as verbal attempts to isolate elements in the critic's general perception of the work. They clarify and articulate the critic's interpretation to the critic himself in terms of further descriptions of aspects of that interpretation. Secondly, the critic may use these perception-focusing reasons as devices to clarify and convey his interpretation to his reader by inducing in the reader the desired view of the

[22]C. L. Stevenson, "On the Reasons That Can Be Given for the Interpretation of a Poem", in *Philosophy Looks at the Arts*, *op. cit.* (fn. 6), p. 124.

[23]Stevenson, "Interpretation and Evaluation in Aesthetics", *op. cit.* (fn. 10), p. 359.

[24]J. Smith, "*Faustus* as Allegory", in W. Farnham (ed.), *op. cit.* (fn. 21), p. 27.

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work. The interpreting critic is trying to get his reader to perceive the work in a certain way (the right way, or an allegedly successful way), and the reasons he gives for his interpretation are devices to induce in the reader the desired perception of the work.

Wittgenstein, it would seem, originated this view, and a great many contemporary aestheticians adhere to it in some form or another: Aldrich, Osborne, Isenberg, and Ziff,[25] to name but a few. G. E. Moore describes Wittgenstein's position as follows:

> *Reasons*, he said, in Aesthetics are "of the nature of further descriptions": e.g., you can make a person see what Brahms was driving at by showing him lots of different pieces by Brahms, or by comparing him with a contemporary author; and that all Aesthetics does is to draw your attention to a thing, to place things side by side. He said that if, by giving reasons of this sort, you make another person "see what you see" but it still doesn't appeal to him, that is "an end" of the discussion.[26]

Here the relation between reasons and interpretative conclusion is not logical, nor is it causal in the sense that the reasons are causes of the critic's particular interpretation. Moreover, it is only the giving of these reasons, and not the reasons themselves, which may be a cause of the reader's accepting the critic's interpretation; for following the given reasons may help the reader to focus on the work so that he sees it as the critic does. Suppose that in presenting an interpretation of a love poem as harsh and insincere, the critic cites the predominance of voiced plosives and the similarity of its imagery to some bawdy song. Neither the plosives nor the similarity are themselves what cause the reader to perceive the poem as harsh and insincere, but the act of citing these reasons may focus attention on the work in such a way that the perception of harshness and insincerity is induced.

Thus, the perceptualist sees the critic's use of reasons in justifying an interpretation not as logically confirming it by evidence, nor as recommending it through the motives which caused it, but simply as perceptually justifying it by creating in the reader the desired perception. Reasons are but "hints and directions for focusing the attention in the very difficult art of exercising and cultivating the skill to perceive".[27] The meaning of the critic's reasons "is "filled in", "rounded out" or "completed" by the act of perception", where the goal is "to induce a sameness of vision, of experienced content".[28] The interpreter's success is to get the reader to assent by bringing him to share the interpreter's perception or experience of the work.

There are critics whose arguments suit the perceptualist position. One

[25]Aldrich, *op. cit.* (fn. 10); H. Osborne, *Aesthetics and Criticism* (London, 1955); Isenberg, *op. cit.* (fn. 10); P. Ziff, "Reasons in Art Criticism", in *Philosophy Looks At The Arts*, *op. cit.* (fn. 6).

[26]G. E. Moore, "Wittgenstein's Lectures in 1930-33", in H. Osborne (ed.), *Aesthetics* (Oxford, 1972), p. 88.

[27]H. Osborne, *Aesthetics and Criticism*, p. 320.

[28]Isenberg, *op. cit.* (fn. 10), p. 148.

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aesthetician, John Casey,[29] has argued that Leavis employs such perceptualist reasoning and is consequently a superior critic. Leavis is indeed a master of this technique, and he seems to be aware that he uses it to induce sameness of vision or experienced content.

> I hoped, by putting in front of them . . . my own developed "coherence of response", to get them to agree (with, no doubt, critical qualifications) that the map, the essential order, of English poetry seen as a whole did, when they interrogated their experience, look like that to them also (*The Common Pursuit*, p. 214).

An excellent example of how Leavis tries to induce such sameness of vision in the interpretation of a single work is in his above-mentioned study of *Othello*, which is far too long to present here, but which consists of a series of excerpts from the text, where each passage is preceded by "focusing instructions" of what we are to look for and see in it.

We have seen three different theories of the role of reasons in interpretation, and there is considerable controversy as to which of them is correct. None, one feels, is entirely convincing, but each seems to have some element of truth. Is it not reasonable to suggest that there are at least three different roles or kinds of reasons in interpretation? There are reasons which function as evidence towards an interpretative conclusion, reasons which are essentially motives or causes in a decision to take and recommend a particular view of the work of art, and reasons (often in the form of further descriptions and comparisons) which function as devices to clarify or induce a particular perception of the work. The diversity of reasons seems to stem from a diversity of interpretative aims. Do we want authorial intention, maximal enjoyment, or articulation and sharing of our own perception of the work?

Philosophers who seek a simple and uniform analysis of interpretation and critics who regard all but their own aims and practices as invalid might reject variant aims and practices as either "non-aesthetic", hedonistically unobjective, or unsystematic and "unscientific". But one cannot legislate them out of existence. They are interpretative enterprises that are pursued, often fruitfully, by qualified critics, and an adequate analysis of the logic of interpretation cannot ignore them.

IV

Though the debate about the logic of interpretation seems to focus on the two aspects we have so far considered, one might perhaps conceive a third aspect to this issue. This would concern the general character or structure of interpretative argument, i.e., whether it is typically inductive, deductive, both, or neither. Controversy would no doubt arise were aestheticians called upon to adopt one of these answers, and I would like to avoid such controversy by briefly suggesting that different interpretative games differ here also. Some are typically inductive, some have distinctly deductive elements, while others seem to present a logic of an entirely different sort.

[29] J. Casey, *The Language of Criticism* (London, 1966).

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Historical critics who see as their goal the revelation of the author's intention naturally tend to present interpretative arguments which are essentially inductive in character and which point to a probabilistic conclusion. Data may be gathered from dictionary meanings, from the author's life and other works, and from the conventions and beliefs of the author's audience, etc., to suggest and confirm an hypothesis regarding the meaning the author intended in the work. Such an interpretative programme can indeed fall within a general inductive framework, as even its opponents, e.g., Stevenson, confess.

I know of no aesthetician who has argued that interpretative logic is deductive. Weitz, however, does speak of all interpretations as essentially being explanation in terms of a specific hypothesis which is derived from a general hypothesis and a theory "about which category or combination of categories of explanation is most effective",[30] and some of the interpretative arguments he examines do have a somewhat deductive character. For example (Weitz, p. 135), Caroline Spurgeon's interpretation of *Hamlet* may be schematically presented as deducing its conclusion from two premises. (1) In Shakespearean drama the imagery is central and conveys the meaning. (2) *Hamlet*'s imagery is predominantly that of disease and decay. (3) Therefore, *Hamlet*'s meaning is that of man's condition of disease and decay. Of course, the premise that decay imagery is predominant would seem to be justified inductively, but still the argument appears to have a general deductive framework.

There are some interpretative arguments which seem neither inductive nor deductive nor some combination of the two, but which are often employed with considerable success. Such arguments frequently consist of a complex arrangement of focusing remarks, leading questions, and suggested answers, which bring an often imaginary interlocutor to a certain desired conclusion. This type of argument might be called dialectical or rhetorical and may be found in philosophical writings as disparate as Plato's dialogues and Wittgenstein's *Investigations*. Some philosophers of art suggest that interpretative argument is essentially of this sort. Some critics, e.g., Leavis, confess that this is what they actually do; putting their judgements in the form: 'This is so, is it not?' to invite "a collaborative exchange or commerce".[31]

There is no doubt that certain critics employ such dialectical arguments of suggestion, question, and comparison; treating the reader as an interlocutor and constantly appealing to and compelling his assent. Take the following example from Leavis's interpretation of Blake's poem, *Hear the Voice of the Bard.*

> In spite of the semi-colon at the end of the second line we find ourselves asking whether it is the Holy Word or the Bard that is calling

[30]Weitz, *op. cit.* (fn. 7), p. 255.

[31]F. R. Leavis, "Mr. Pryce-Jones, the British Council and British Culture", *Scrutiny*, 18 (1951-2), p. 227.

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> the "lapsed soul". There is clearly a reference to the voice of God in the Garden calling Adam, but is it God who is weeping in the evening dew? And is it God that *might* control the starry pole?—though it could hardly be the Soul (an interpretation permitted by punctuation and syntax) that might? And surely "fallen light" is Lucifer? . . .
>
> Looking back at the first stanza we can see how Blake *uses* the Christian theme and subdues it completely to his own unorthodox purpose. The opening line is Druid and pagan in suggestion (how utterly remote from Gray's Bard Blake is!) and "Present, Past, and Future" suggests Fates, Weirds, or Norns—suggests, in fact, anything but a distinctively Christian sense of Time and Destiny. . . .[32]

This sort of argument is neither deductive nor inductive, yet we cannot deny that it is argument, indeed powerful and effective argument. Thus, as we found no one logical status for interpretative statements and no single, uniform role of interpretative reasons, so there would seem to be no one general form of interpretative argument. Interpretative logic is a hotchpotch.

V

What conclusions may be drawn from this survey of the variant theories of the logic of interpretation and the variant practices on which these theories may be based and supported? Most simply, that interpretative logic is very complex and varied. There is more than one aspect to the analysis of the logic of interpretation, and even with respect to the same aspect there is more than one "logic" to be analysed. Theoretical pluralism seems to be the only position that an analyst can honestly maintain in the face of a pluralism of practice.

I believe that similar conclusions would be reached in an analysis of the logic of evaluation. There too one may detect the same three aspects for analysis and the same variety of philosophical positions with respect to each. Again, these different positions on evaluation could be shown to reflect the plurality or variety of logics in actual critical practice, which in turn reflects a variety of evaluative aims. However, my position of logical pluralism with respect to evaluation requires much fuller exposition and justification, which, of course, I shall have to present in another paper.

The pluralism I maintain should be distinguished from a more limited pluralism which recognizes merely a plurality of valid objects and methods of interpretation. According to such pluralism, there are many approaches to and aspects of a work of literature with respect to which true (or plausible) interpretative assertions can be made. There can be true interpretation of what the work meant to its author and true interpretation of what it means to the reader, true interpretation of its contemporary social meaning and true interpretation of its archetypal meaning. Thus, we can have differing

[32] F. R. Leavis, *Revaluation* (Harmondsworth, 1972), pp. 133-4.

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and often apparently conflicting interpretative assertions that are all true or plausible.

Such a position is on the right track, and unhappily too few critics and philosophers have recognized this plurality.[33] I grant such plurality but go further by arguing that not all interpretations are assertions that may be true or plausible. Nor are all interpretations recommendations, nor are they all performances. Interpretative statements rather exhibit a plurality of logical status as well as a plurality of subject matter and viewpoint.

Interpretation is not *one* game but a *family* of games; and as in other families, there are sibling rivalries where the value and even legitimacy of certain members of the family are bitterly contested. It is not the job of the philosopher of criticism, as analyst, to award the birthright. Having identified and analysed the various interpretative games, he must let them justify themselves, as they have justified and must justify themselves, in actual critical practice. Having distinguished between the different species, he must rely on the survival of the fittest.

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[33]The literary critics and theorists R. S. Crane, E. Olson, and R. McKeon, who belong to the "Chicago school" of criticism, are among the few who maintain this pluralist position.

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